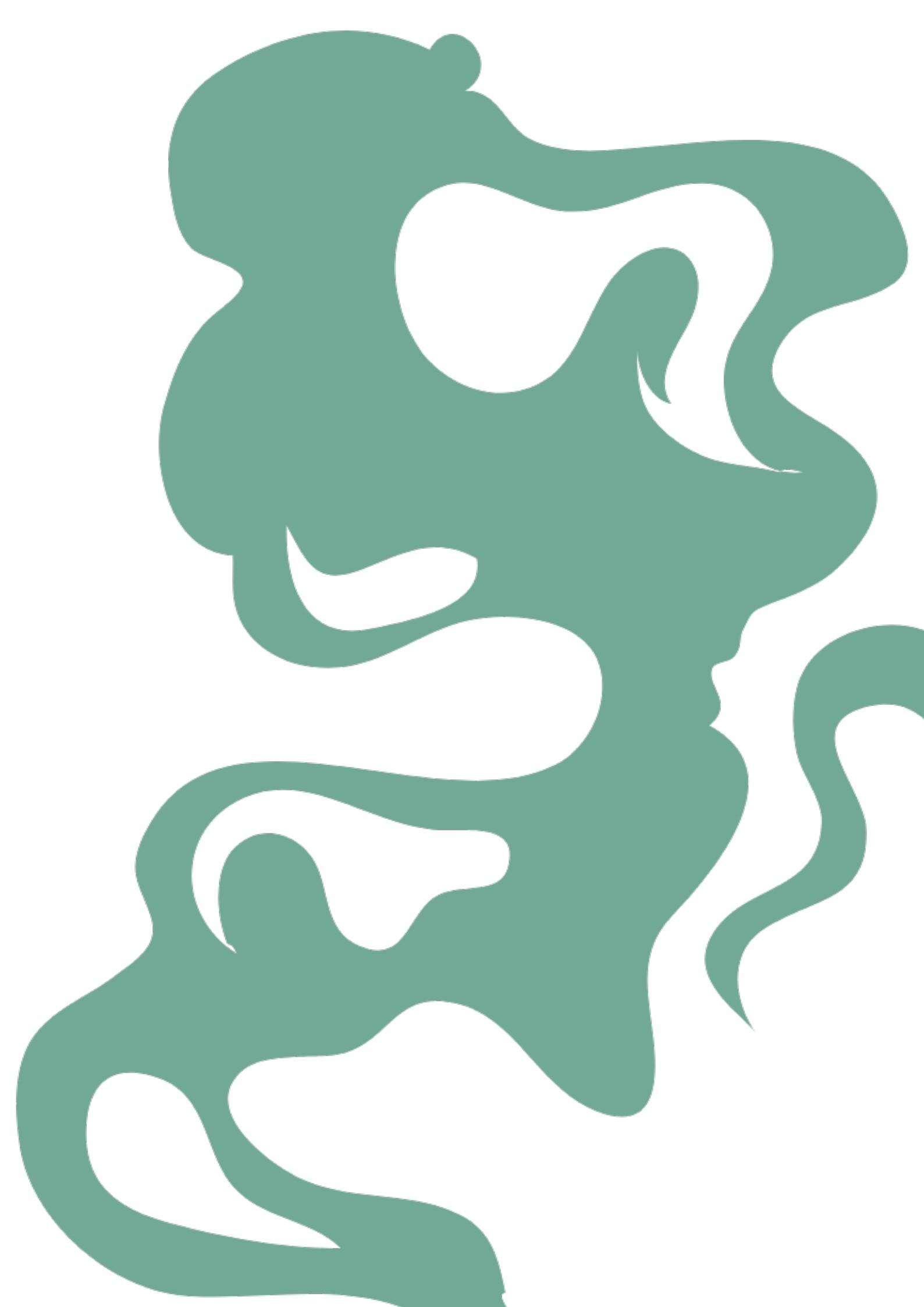


THE SPECTATORIAL

Volume X





THE
SPECTATORIAL
Volume X



Proudly operating out of Innis College



Innis College

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UNIVERSITY OF
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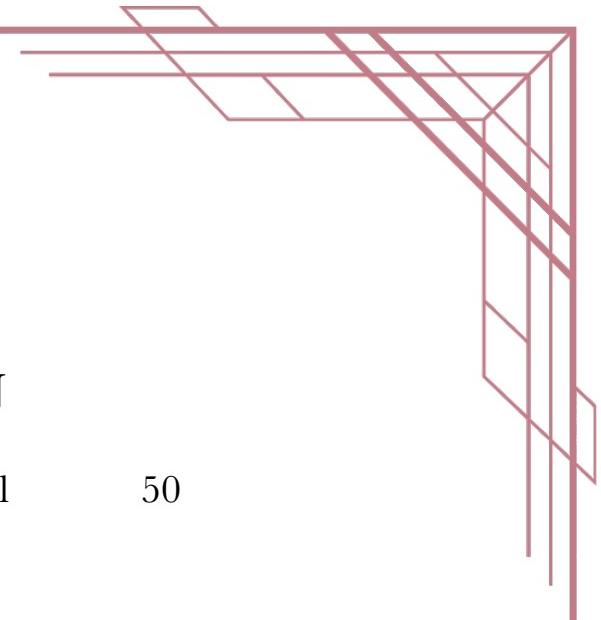
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A Letter from the Editor-in-Chief

To the Reader,

Through the instances of poetry, fiction, and non-fiction collected in *The Spectatorial*, it is easy to see the bright and brilliant representations that the students at the University of Toronto continue to put forth. With every new volume, I am continually astonished and pleased to see the creative and speculative concepts born on our campus. The newest iteration of our journal holds another year of rebirth and hope for all of us that become involved with the team, providing not only a fun outlet for creative space, but the ability to escape into the wonders that our peers at this university create.

Volume X of *The Spectatorial* is one amongst a variety of new opportunities and awakenings. As we continue to see change everywhere in the world, the value of speculative fiction, and that fiction's ability to reflect the world that we live in, is unchanging. The wonder available in worlds away from those we know will remain mystical and reassuring through an endlessly changing world. When the world is fraught with uncertainty we can turn to a look on vampirism, the tale of dead dogs you should not eat, or even some brilliant interrogations of existing speculative fiction.

The Spectatorial and all of its contributors have put a lot of effort into the creation of our tenth volume, despite our own individual change and evolution as we continue find our footing as a publication. Our entire team has been working to create the sustainable community that values and puts out these wonderful pieces of speculative fiction, but in the end, we would be nothing without the genuine interest and contributions from the community.

Our little community is absolutely over the moon to share the work that we have cultivated this time around. The ability to connect with, and facilitate, speculative community is something that is eternally dear to our hearts. I know that we are all extremely excited to put forth this volume. I hope you enjoy reading our little collection of fictional lies a much as we have enjoyed working on it.

Sincerely,

Riley Switzman
Editor in Chief



A Letter from the Creative Director

Life can be wonderfully unpredictable, a state of constant movement, each day as unprecedented as the next. And that is what makes it all the more terrifying. No matter the story we tell, we come back to the hardships and the pleasures of our interconnected lives. During a time that almost feels speculative in its own right, we have found solace in the written worlds of the unknown.

This edition of *The Spectatorial* includes a wide range of works from the horrors of the long lost woods, heartbreak for the supernatural, to the ramifications of commodifying life. Each one of them creates and tells of a world that is not quite our own, but not quite different. Speculative fiction allows us to understand our own humanity in the distinctly inhuman and supernatural.

I have had the pleasure of bringing this journal to life through my own eyes, and creating works of art to the unseen fantastical works of fiction and non-fiction. I was inspired to create something that could quite literally brighten one's day through its vibrancy and colour. In designing this volume of *The Spectatorial*, I wanted to express that there is something whimsical and fantastical that is born from chaos.

This year we spent our time wondering: “what’s next for us?” in a constant state of change, never knowing what tomorrow might have in store. But speculative fiction can reflect a world that is just as—or even more—absurd than our own. Yet, it is still able to sustain that fantastical magic, and perhaps allow us to see the magic in our own world.

A wise friend once told me that it only takes a small flame to bring brightness into a dark room. I am infinitely proud to present Volume X of *The Spectatorial*, and I hope that this collection of stories, essays, and illustrations can be your flame.

With appreciation,
Katherine Zheng
Creative Director



POETRY



red/woods/wolf

By Shirley Chen



once upon 11:32 pm

stopped by the woods on a sh tty evening

one foot in the path well-traveled

another in weeds and shadows

make a run for it!

which direction though?

i don't know

who knows?

its claws drew near, a purr within ears

where do you think you're going, dear?

stood still, and tried to sound sincere

i'll be visiting grandma, here
you don't have a grandma

everyone has grandmas

but not one who lives

in woods that eat children

i do

these flowers are for her?

yes

oh hoodie, my sweetie
i know you

head home, be good, and go to sleep

if you know me
then you know my heart has promises to keep

you know, in the woods,
every breath's a promise
fairies danced goosebumps onto skin
we fluttered, and felt free

no matter how delicious her air, she is the devil's lair

i know you

how many miles did you run away
but look, you're back to where she lay

i was wrong, wicked
wolf, a monster
but you, ma and pa's
good girl in the woods in the dark
oh the shame! the village will go mad!

good doggy, what are you gonna do? if you dare, eat me
chew petals into pulps, bones into dust
I may lose all my solids and liquids in your incinerator of spite,
but my last breath would override your tongue
and summon blood to sing, smile, paint lips and make ink
and swim in your nerves, esophagus, every pore pore pore
and soar right out and roar and you'll be disgusted by me
nirvana in a belch

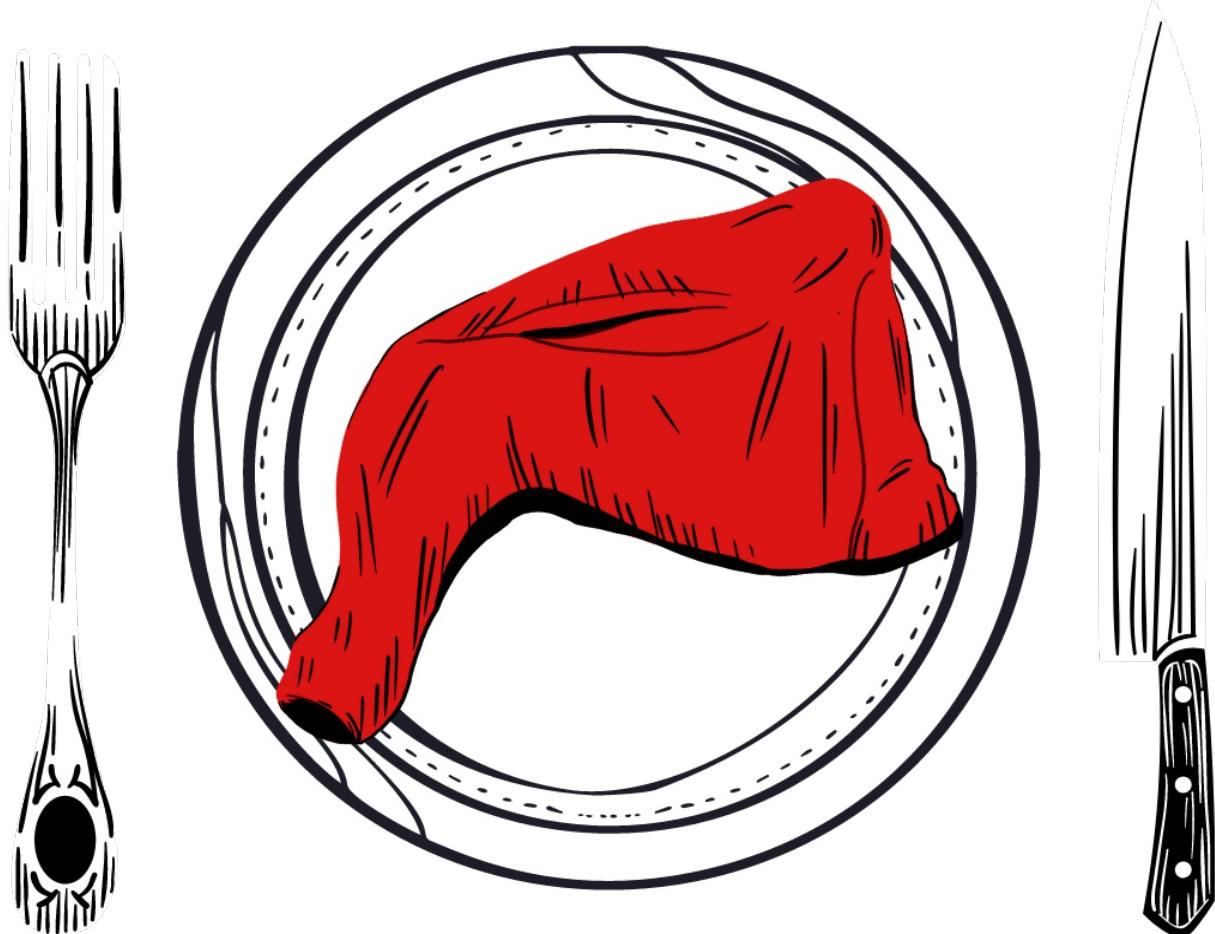
i'll simply howl and let the huntsmen know
so they'll chain you up naked by the road
they'll sneer, what a queer sight! then forget you
even your grandchild won't recognize you
as you'll grow thick fur and big teeth and miserably old and then go
in a whimper

the world huffed and puffed and
an easy wind blew out the pages

stay
with me
from beginning to the end, you'll see
never was a wolf, nor riding hood
but only the woods
for yours to keep
so lovely, lush and deep.

Dead Dog Do Not Eat

By Julliana “Yanni” Santos



Seven the dog had seven litters
all her life, little jelly-coated
wriggling-things, a few of them
that died. She would lick them dry,
each puppy, bundle them half-
fainting, fierce, ready to maim
anyone who came close.

Seven the dog died seven days
before we left the Philippines.
She knew we were leaving,
said her goodbyes with sugar-
water on her tongue. Her grey
unseeing eyes held every lap
of love against our palms.

Seven the dog ran seven miles
before we noticed she'd been
following our car, that one time
we left her for that trip to Bulacan.
She followed us now, for god knows
how long, all the way to Canada,
half a hemisphere from her grave.

We landed in snow, and I felt her
body brush up against my legs,
kneeling on the hardwood floor,
her sun-baked scent, warm fur
caressing my face as I couldn't cry.
My mother said she dreamt of her
too, her raspy bark, half-sharp.

My father thought he saw her in
the unfamiliar white, the tan of her
hide sticking out, her fox ears
and fox tail twitching in the cold.
Fresh in this stolid world, we tried
to have some fun. Went with some
people to this place: all-you-can-eat

buffet, but the food and the plates
melded into something wretched,
tight in my chest. I felt her shiver
under the table like she would
when fireworks came to our small
house and lit up the sky. Something
soupy, some bread, some steak,

something rich with gunpowder and
a brewing storm. A warm downpour.
The dishes formed into hands and
voices and laughter and people
asking me how I like it here.
How well I speak. How lucky I
am. How could we have left

her there in the dirt, so
far away from us? How could
we have left without even
a moment to mourn every life
giving life giving life? The forks
and knives dug into something
warm – fresh flesh and grey

eyes, and the smell of
sugar-death. Meat and nails,
and a mesh of pain against
my teeth and salt – finally
I could let the tears speak
the truth. She was gone.
Completely consumed.

Seven the dog, she smiled
at me. Split herself seven ways,
slabs of meat on sterile plates.
Her heart: tender, her eyes: roving,
her paws: their ghosts stay placed
on her family's knees. Seven the dog,
stalwartly singing her silent lullaby.



PROSE



Pythia: An Instruction on Oracular Pursuits

By Jade Goh McMillen



Step One: Ascend the mountain.

When you arrive in the highest terraced town on Mount Parnassus – perhaps up the steep stairs from Kirra or perhaps around the road on the gentler slope from Arachova – you’ll find the winds are still. It’s an oddity to be so close to the summit and have the winds be still, but they’ve been so for simply ages. Whatever the season, be it a stiflingly humid summer or the crisp depth of winter, any true Seeker of the oracle’s power will find the winds are ever still.

The three main cobbled streets of the town are joined with gentle sets of stairs, stippled with ivy. They’re lined with stores, houses, and hostels. You’ll want to take a look around before you go any farther, and who could begrudge you that? You’ll need your strength for what comes next, and you’ll need to know what’s behind you just as well as what’s ahead.

You can’t know whether you want it, after all, if you don’t know what you’ll be giving up in exchange.

*

Eons ago – or aeons, really, literal aeons – there lived on this mountain a god: a shining god so bright he was given everything from the day of his birth. The people of this land adored him, and they flocked from all across the Mediterranean Sea, counting themselves lucky for so much as a glimpse of his radiance. Before long, even the sun itself was under his sway, drawn away from its previous ruler by his natural glowing charisma.

On the other side of this mountain lived a little snake who was accustomed to dwelling in the shadows, sheltered by caves and crevices. The snake never had much luck but on the day of the god’s birth, he happened to hide away too slowly, and the young god’s sunlight spilled over to brush across his scales, tying their fates together.

Within the space of a year, the two happened to meet one another on the plateau on Mount Parnassus that would one day become Delphi. They both loved the sun’s warmth and the gentle vibrations of a lyre. In their youth, that was all that they needed – before long, they were the very best of friends.

*

Step Two: Admire local fauna.

Your first step is just a little way up from the Temple of Athena Pronaia – “Athena before the temple”. You’re not going to be asking anything of her, but you’re better off setting out from there than not. If you can’t find it, the local cats know the way; sooner or later they’ll all gather there, every evening at sunset. There are green-eyed and blue-eyed cats all about Greece, but the cats’ eyes in Delphi are all sun gold if you know how to look.

If you go in the summer, the bats and the dream-giving *Oneiroi* will be getting

along well enough. If you go in the winter, there may not be bats at all, though you won't know it at first. When you see one or two dark shapes in the night bouncing in the way owls don't, you'll likely assume that they're bats – who wouldn't?

*

As time went on, the snake and the god grew up together on the mountain, close as close could be. Eventually, they both fell in love with a girl – a sweet-voiced girl who laughed with the *Oneiroi* as they danced on the night winds above her on their way to deliver a bevy of dreams both true and false.

The god and the snake fell in love with her, and they did so in the way of all creatures of magic: with a passion and a haste that was the hallmark of their eternal youth. At the mere sight of her, the world filled with colour, becoming sharper and more vivid yet also taking on all the sweet softness of a dream. When she spoke – oh, how they melted when she spoke! Her words were not meant for them, but to both, the stolen glimpses and echoes on the breeze that reached them carried a sparkling hope of happiness greater than they had ever known before.

“I saw her first,” said the snake.

“I heard her long before,” said the god.

“Well, I imagine she’ll like me better,” said the snake, who knew he was adorable even if his friend was the one on whom all the humans liked to heap praise.

“How do you figure?” asked the god, changing his shape so that he looked like a human – albeit an exceptionally handsome human who shimmered ever so slightly in a diamond-and-opal mist of a thousand colours.

Not to be outdone, the snake bent himself as best he could, rearing up and flaring his elegantly curved crest so that he stood nearly as tall as the god with a head that looked just as wide. They agreed that they would approach the girl together, see which of them she liked best and proceed from there on a grand romance, the winner having the full support of the loser in their little contest; it was absolutely unthinkable that anything else should happen.

At first, the girl was charmed by the two friends. She curtseyed to the god and the snake alike and laughed her bright, chiming laugh when they asked her to tell them which of them she liked best – who was cuter, who was cleverer, who had a chance at her heart?

(They never asked that last question, or not really; they simply assumed she understood that they would like to know.)

Eventually, they asked her outright what it was that she wanted more than anything else in the world. Silently, they agreed between them that this would be their contest: whichever one could give the girl her wish would surely be given her love in return.

“Power,” she said, with a longing look at the *Oneiroi* above.

*

Step Three: Stop for a drink.

You won’t need to go past the falling rocks warning – at least, not yet. If you find it posted on the fence by the mountain road, just look beyond it and you’ll see the trail of water leading to a little spout that pokes out from a bit of ancient wall: the Castalian Spring. Follow along the outside of the fence; don’t so much as touch the forest just yet.

There isn’t a lion’s head sculpted around the spout, but you’ll see one anyway if you’re meant to proceed. By this step, a true Seeker is ready to become a once and future oracle, never simply tied to one level of reality. Sometimes its mouth stretches into a roar, defiant of its nonexistence. Now and again it looks to be yawning – and could you blame it? Lions have never been meant for long millennia of simply sitting.

Its coat is metal, but it’s never quite been able to settle the question of which one: one moment tin, brass the next – or copper, perhaps with a distinguished veneer of verdigris. Perhaps you’ll know when you see it... or perhaps you won’t. It might be best if you don’t: a true Seeker must abandon such feeble concepts as knowledge and certainty, for they are incompatible with the oracle’s gifts.

The water that flows out from it carries the sunlight like a diamond, glistening with whispers of a rainbow in its myriad folds and facets. It dries the moment it touches the ground, never leaving anything so inelegant as a puddle on the stone below. If you look closely, you may see it doesn’t quite reach the ground. Go on – drink it in with your eyes before you drink it in for true.

Spend as much time as you need to be absolutely certain – presupposing that that’s on the order of minutes or hours, not days or weeks – and then take the water.

A mouthful should do just fine; no need to put your head over the spout or anything like that. You might find it feels colder than it should – ice-cold even in the summer, turning quickly from refreshingly cool and sweet into a burning chill that twists its way through your veins and leaves you shivering like the first frissons of a fever.

Believe me, that would be a good sign.

*

The girl drank deep from that same spout long ago, on the instructions of her would-be lovers. The spring carried blessings from the god’s older sisters, clever and spirited goddesses of many things, who had been bathing at the source uphill; when she so much as touched the water to her lips, she began to cough and gasp.

When the god and the snake asked her what was wrong, she said only that the water was cold. The god didn’t think to do anything about that, but the snake gave her a scale soaked in his friend’s sunlight to warm her up.

The girl, it transpired, had always wanted to see the world as it was – as it was, as it had been, and as it would be. Such was the power she sought, and such was the power she was granted, after a fashion... though she would often say, with that pretty laugh of hers, that there was no “would” to the future – only “might”.

For a time, the three of them lived a life full of joy.

*

Step Four: Climb to the seat of power.

If the water’s magic sets in right, you’ll start to see the path up to the cave – fence or no fence, the way should be perfectly clear to you. (If it doesn’t, well... To put it mildly, you won’t need to worry about finding the rest of the way to the oracle’s seat.) The mountain’s rocky slope may look daunting, but that’ll pose no problem for you. At the least, it’ll suit you better to find out sooner rather than later if the spring’s blessing didn’t take. Provided you keep to the path, the slope will seem to flatten around you – try not to look too long at the trees and rocks while your new eyes are still settling into your head, or else you might find the way they warp rather nauseating.

Not quite at the summit, you’ll reach the cave that keeps the ancient tripod. The mouth is small, not quite wide enough for two to stand shoulder-to-shoulder and looks more like a crack in a wall than anything.

Still, you can’t miss it, for the path that you’ll follow will be made of sunlight. It won’t be blinding, but it will be warm: blissfully, terribly warm.

After all, they say that tools come to reflect their owners.

*

The girl had her power now, but still could not love either one of them in the way that they loved her – neither the god with his warm glow nor the snake with his flittering tongue. She told them both as much when she realized what it was that they wanted from her, but they were not happy to hear it. The god thought he had won their contest by leading her to his sisters’ spring, which had given her power; the snake thought he had won their contest by virtue of the girl not having fallen in love with the god.

The snake was distraught, but he tried giving her one final gift: the gift of eternal life. Until her bones crumbled away to dust, he promised, and even long after, she would remain in the seat of her power.

The god, meanwhile, was full of rage. His sunlight-hemmed chiton flapped and rippled as the air trembled with his power and wrath; one hyacinth nearly fell from where it pinned his hair in place behind his ear, but thought better of it, instead grabbing on to the golden laurel leaves upon his brow and holding fast for dear life.

When his beauty and his ire did nothing to win her love, the god tried giving her a curse instead. Until such time as she learned to love him, he swore, no word from her mouth could ever be heeded in full.

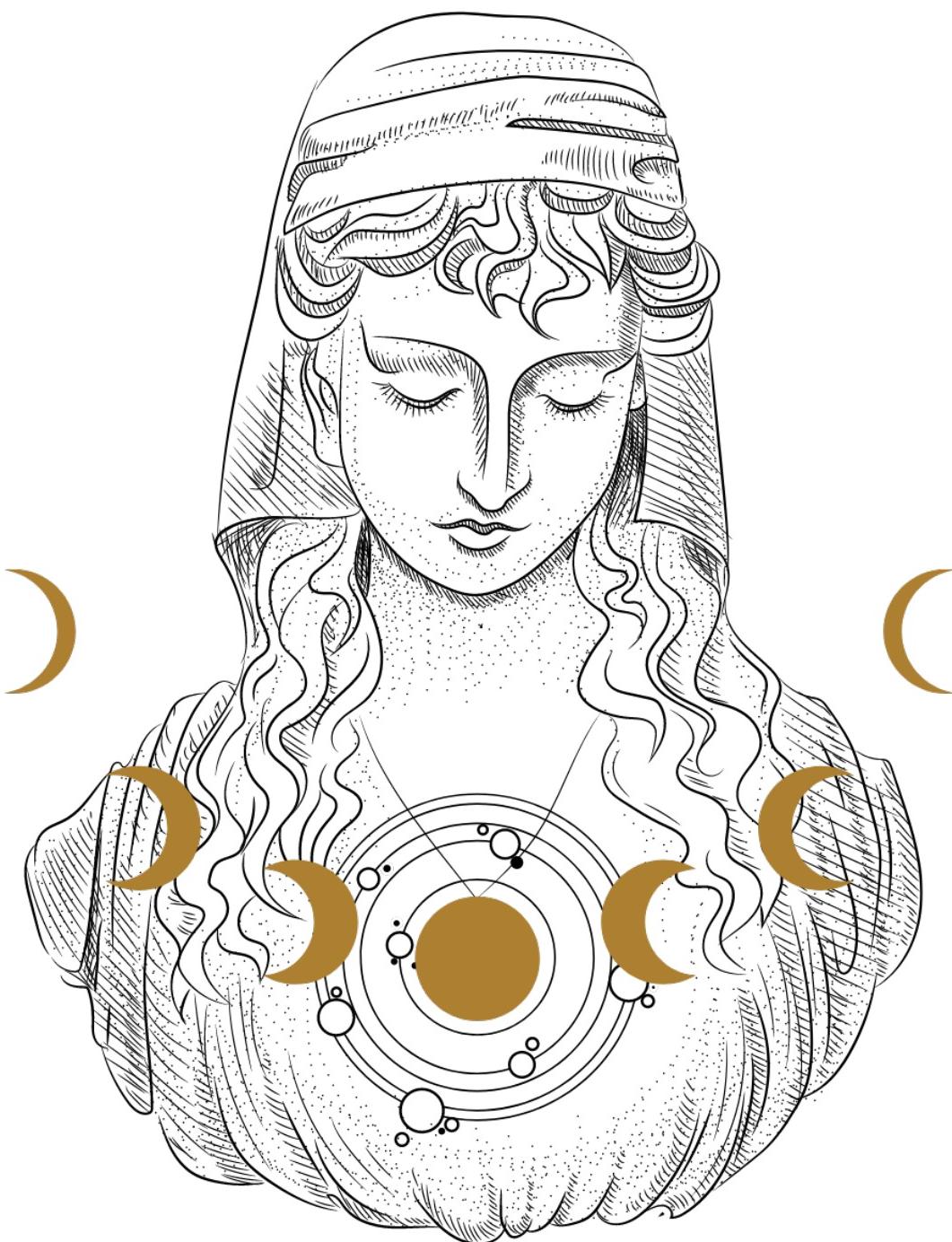
Smoke, they call what's left of her now: a dream-maker that can reach out and speak to those who dare pass into what was once her sanctuary but can still never be believed. The god will not lift his curse; the snake will not revoke his gift. She lives on, lingering in her place of power, and one assumes she has that power still, for all the good it does her.

*

In the end, one of us will be there to greet you in your new power – the power of an oracle. Who would you rather see: the god or the snake?

Cannot Help Myself

By Eva Chang



“I love you,” he says, pressing a ghostly kiss upon my forehead. His voice is soft and certain.

“I love you too, human,” I reply.

He smiles. He knows he is more than human to me.

I make my decision then. I will make him immortal.

The humans see the moon before they ever see my physical form, and it is no different with Endymion. The summer months bring a heaviness to the Greek earth and he lays naked while he sleeps. His body splayed out on a sheepskin rug is bathed by my light. His dark hair shines as he adjusts his reclining position. The muscles in his chest and arms strain, casting dark shadows that highlight his form. I take my time—as a god tends to—soaking up his image.

At first, I can only bear to stare. I have seen the others on the Pantheon do things that were all too similar — silly little passions for carnal human bodies. They chase, they transform, they trick, all to obtain the lovers they long for. When I see Endymion, I understand at last. The ennui of immortality settles deep into my being when I see his youthful form. I try to resist contact, but perhaps I already know that I will not be able to.

He does not awaken when my chariot crashes into Earth and I stumble, a mess, into his cavern abode towards the flickering light of fire emanating from within. His belongings strewn about inside are indications of not just shelter, but home. I briefly examine the intricate spears placed side-by-side against the wall, with bright feathers attached at the spearhead and soft ribbon wrapped tight around the long wooden shafts. The sharp stone arrowheads sparkle under the firelight.

He is a hunter. His days must be long and laboured. I have never known such a life.

He does not see me, for he sleeps so soundly that Hypnos himself must have invoked it. I comb my hands through my messy hair and smooth out the wrinkles and wipe the stains on my silken dress, even though he is not aware of my existence. I stay and watch over him until the cuts and bruises on my skin heal. I leave before daylight, lest he stir from his sleep.

Before I leave, I let my moonlight plant a kiss upon him. The glow impresses itself on his cheek, a testament to my inhuman touch. I cannot help myself.

I return again and again, bathing him in my luminescence until I cannot endure my irrational silence. *I must tell him of my presence. It is only fair.*

On Demeter's longest day, I entrust my journey to Helios and travel to the mountains at early sunset. My eternal heart beats heavy as I let light flow from my fingertips and into the cavern, bright enough to wake him. The glow of the fire pales in comparison as my presence fills the room.

Disoriented, he slowly opens his eyes and adjusts to consciousness.

"Hello," I greet him cautiously.

"Goddess," he breathes, propping his body up on his elbows.

"Do not—" Self-conscious, I put a hand on my cheek and look down, unable to meet his eyes. "You do not need to call me that."

"...Oh." He, too, seems embarrassed. He takes his sheepskin and drapes it over the bottom half of his body.

"I am Selene," I say.

"You are the goddess—er, you are the *bringer* of the Moon to Earth. You bring light to the night sky."

I nod, surprised by the reminder of my importance. "Who are you?"

"My name is Endymion."

"Endymion." I let the name slip through my teeth, savouring its syllables. "Endymion, I have been... I found you not very long ago. I have been watching over you. You are beautiful."

I reach for him. He sits up. Our hands phase through each other, unable to truly touch. Only my moonlit aura can grasp him, leaving a glowing mark on his arm, goosebumps trailing along his skin. I swallow. Such a body should stay young forever.

"You are too," he says, his voice quiet. He rubs his forearm, deep in thought. "I have heard stories of the gods... approaching mortals. Have you come to fall in love with me?"

"I already have."

"Selene," he greets me, half-awake, and takes me into his arms. I cannot feel his touch, but we lie together nonetheless.

"Endymion." My body flushes with light. We take a moment to rest. My chariot used to call for his day's rest, but not anymore. I only stay for a few moments at a time, however, because he must rise early. I brush my fingers against my sleepless eyelids. Sometimes I pretend to slumber while I am with him.

"What do you do under Helios' light?" I turn towards him.

Endymion looks towards the spears now scattered on the floor. “You’re never on Earth during the day, are you?”

I shake my head, thoughts of Olympus clouding my mind. I spend my days wandering its gardens and conversing with the other gods. They talk of their exploits, influencing the lives of whatever mortals they currently favor. In more ways than I can fathom, they harness their powers to shape lives, wars, legends. I understand. How else could a god live, if not to affect the world that rests at their whim?

“I roam the outlying planes and forests and provide meat for the nearby villages. When I can, I study the world. The trees, the animals—I observe. I try to remember what I see,” he explains.

“I usually see the world in darkness. From far away, from above.”

“Stay until dawn. Then you can see.”

“But you must sleep.”

Endymion yawns, but smiles. “Not necessarily. Not tonight. I am obligated to extend the invitation. Just as I am obligated to be of service to you.”

I sigh. “You do not have to.”

“It is how I was taught to act in the presence of the gods.”

I can see now that his wishes match mine. It seems to be a pattern among the others in the pantheon, at least when the relations go well. I do not know what to make of Endymion and I, but I believe we can only grow closer. My heart softens in his presence.

I am not excited to see the Sun rise over the sea, or the grass planes bloom into lush greens, or the villagers stoke their fires. I am not surprised to see the woodland creatures arise from their slumber and begin foraging. Helios and Apollo already taught me—well, *boasted*—about such sights.

But I stay with Endymion.

“There is more than just one sea,” I say, after a lull of silence. “Countless lands separated by unfathomable distance. More than your kind could ever discover in your lifetime.”

“There is?”

I nod. His eyes twinkle under my light, starry, and they seem to melt into mine. I love him, and I cannot fathom him feeling anything but the same in return. I yearn to take him to my world.

I cannot help but think that I must not know any better. I am no different from the rest of my brethren gods, am I not? It may be different with Endymion. He may be

happy in the end.

I do not trick him. The weight of his decision rests on his shoulders. I am far from the first in the pantheon to do this, but I recognize that I must do so responsibly, lest I hurt him.

I love him far too much to do that.

“Zeus will grant you immortality,” I tell him. I do not tell him that we will be able to touch, that he will see the sky, the pantheon, the entire universe. I cannot skew his choice.

“He will?”

“If you agree.”

Perhaps contemplation clouds his expression: his eyebrows furrowed, his muscles taut. But when our eyes meet, he seems to have made his decision.

He kisses me before shutting his eyes, falling asleep for one last time. I look up. Light beams from above me – Zeus’ glow reaching deep into Endymion’s chest. His skin becomes soft to the touch, tangible. I let out a deep sigh, watching his peaceful state.

“Let me show you my home,” I whisper into his ear, before taking him up to the heavens. He must ease into immortality slowly. We must explore the world slowly. One swath of land at a time, because I fear that we will have too much mindless eternity.

Autumn arrives. I watch the villages from above, taking my nightly chariot across the sky. I think of Endymion when I do, those nights in his cavern home.

Their beloved hunter, gone.



Stains

By Eva Chang



She'd never tasted someone so sweet before Daphne.

Elle wiped the excessive dribbles of clear, sticky snot from her nose and answered the door as a put-together mess (clothes from the day still on, buttons slightly undone and fabric pooling in unattractive places). The delivery guy tried not to bat an eye. He probably did it anyway.

"For Elle Rodriguez?" He lifted the large box in his hands in a cautious greeting.

"Yep. That's... me." She trailed off, just then having the realization that she did not want to be herself nor part of the situation she was in. She shut the door without any more pleasantries, clutching the box to her chest. Scents seeped out from the packaging: a mixture, almost an overwhelming combination, of blood from various donors. She forced her nausea down with a large, heavy sigh. Her nose twitched anyway.

--*Take care of yourself.*

Sorry, Steph. I can't do it.

"That's rough, buddy," Steph had also said, earlier that day.

It was, mordantly, the best reply Elle had received in response to the breakup.

"—Don't tell me I deserve better," Elle cut in, before Steph could say anything more. Steph wasn't really ever one to be very wordy, but that seemed to be the default saying these days, no matter the person—from the barista at the Clockhouse Cafe to the Saturday reading club. Even the blood delivery guy from the Red Cross seemed sort of awkward and put off by the small talk Elle brought up. She supposed humans weren't very used to hearing about vampire drama. Or maybe he was put off by the lesbian thing. Or both?

Daphne would've laughed at that. Her shoulders would've bobbed up and down delicately while she sipped her iced coffee and listened to Elle and Steph converse. She'd wear a floppy sun hat that Elle convinced her to buy in Kensington (more like Daphne was on the fence about it and just wanted someone to tell her to get it), and maybe she would've done that thing where she massaged her left shoulder, out of habit.

But Daphne wasn't here.

"I won't," Steph replied. She pulled her dyed hair back and rolled up the sleeve of her red t-shirt, revealing the curve of her shoulder. Etched there was a black and white moth tattoo, dark ink contrasting with her pale skin. "Come on, let the homoeroticism commence."

"Okay, wait—" Elle forced out a laugh, masking the anxiety bubbling at her chest. The sun started to feel like it was piercing through the shade of Steph's backyard awning. "No, wait, I need a second."

"Won't you just feel worse the longer you go without blood?"

"Yeah, but this is different. I need to, like... I don't know. Prepare. Mentally. Sorry."

Daphne, though not quite understanding, would've nodded in sympathy. Her legs would've crossed knee over knee and she would've gone to read, or glance at her phone, and waited ever so patiently for Elle to feel comfortable.

Steph promptly rolled down her sleeve and stood from the lawn chair. "Do you want some tea first?"

"Yes. Thank you."

Elle trailed behind Steph into the kitchen and thought about how good of a couple they'd be if they actually liked each other that way. It'd be easier to get over Daphne, of course. Of fucking course.

She rested her arms against the cold tile of the counter and let herself ride that wave of sadness. The clinking of ice echoed through her brain... no, no, she felt safe here. Perfectly fine. Peachy. The nest of plants tucked into the corners of the room, the sunlight, and the lingering scent of incense—all indications of a home. Steph was a cozy person.

Steph was... a taurus sun.

"*Oh, man, look at all the earth in her chart,*" Daphne whispered.

"I'll make the sweet tea," Steph said, voice slightly distant and pushed to the background of Elle's thoughts. "It's the breakup, right? That's making it hard."

"Huh?"

"You've never been so nervous to bite me."

"I guess." *Yes. Definitely.* "I'm thinking about her too much."

Aww. That's flattering"

"That's normal," Steph cut in. "I don't want it to be like that. I wanna move on."

"Of course you do. You're going to have to take steps to get to that 'moved on' feeling."

"I know. I know."

I want Daphne.

"You smell... *so* good," Elle breathed, her nose brushing against Daphne's neck. They were sitting on Daphne's bed, shoulder to shoulder. Elle picked up on notes of lavender and honey, before perking up.

"Is that weird to say?" she asked. Soft strands of Daphne's brown hair slid across Elle's face. They smelled just as intoxicating, of course—of natural shampoo, sugary like her body scrubs. Aromas that were irresistible layers of temptation, paired together in the manner of a dessert menu. She'd always been so upkeep, so nicely dressed, so much more beautiful...

"No," Daphne laughed. The skirt of her dress pooled at her lap as she shifted

her head, giving Elle more access to her bare skin. “It’s cute.”

“God, what is this scent?”

“New perfume—the new Marc Jacobs one, *Daisy*. I didn’t know it’d elicit such a response.”

Elle sighed, taking in another inhale. “Can I... can I just...”

“Yeah, go ahead.”

She ran her tongue over the tips of her fangs.

Bite.

Fighting the urge to slide down the door and collapse, Elle stumbled to her couch. Tears drip, drip, dripped onto the cardboard box, marked with hazard symbols. She could barely eat or drink--but she had to.

Elle tore open the packaging and shoved the container onto the table in front of her, adding to the array of unclean dishes. The blood was held in medical bags arranged in neat rows, staining the corners of the plastic, yet unable to escape the seals. They sloshed back and forth synchronously in greeting to Elle. She grabbed one and ripped it open, then leaned back on her couch and tipped it into her mouth. The proceeding droplets came with a clean, packaged taste that made her tongue sting.

“Oh, God,” Daphne breathed.

The blood tasted even better than the smell. It was a springtime picnic, sweet, but so deeply and darkly savory that it made Elle’s taste buds prickle. It tasted like aged wine and ripe grapes all at once, like hints of browned strawberries and cherries, bright honey, muted tones of brie.

“Elle—”

Daphne pressed her hands into her thighs and ran them up her skin. She shivered—this is how she’d once described it to Elle—in a mixture of sharp pain, a tingling pleasure that ran down her body, and an utter urge to... submit. As if Elle’s nails were claws that encased Daphne’s entire being. “Mm?” Elle inquired.

“Don’t stop, Elle,” Daphne replied, voice small.

Blood trailed down Elle’s chin and onto her hair and shirt, leaving stains, as the serrated edges of the plastic brushed against her lips. Disgusting. She’d never bothered to clean up these spills. Disgusting. She had to feed. Disgusting. This was not Daphne. She should go to Daphne’s. Waltz right in and bite. Daphne didn’t want to talk to her anyway.

How could you think that?

I want to kill her.

No, I don’t.

Fuck her, then? Get fucked?

No, I don't.

Steph handed Elle a tall glass of tea. It had a dainty little sprig of mint on the top.

"I'm sorta afraid that whatever blood I have now is gonna be awful compared to hers," Elle rambled. "And that whenever I drink I'll just be reminded of, like, what we did together. I don't think I can ever get over what she... tasted like."

Disgusting. Elle wished she hadn't said that. She took a large sip of the tea. The lemony sugar settled uncomfortably into her own bloodstream.

Once again, Steph made no indication of any judgement. She was always good at hiding those things. "You won't know if you'll feel any of those things until you drink again. Come on, you have to get some nutrients into your body eventually. And I have an appointment at two that I need to get to." Steph leaned across the counter and grabbed Elle's arm, squeezing it. "You're losing strength."

Elle nodded curtly, saliva curling up her tongue. "I think I'm ready then. I guess." If Steph waited any longer, she might just get annoyed and tell Elle she couldn't do anything for her. Not even provide her blood.

They meandered back outside. As Steph sat back in her chair, Elle dragged her tongue against the tips of her fangs, subconsciously checking if they were still sharp.

"Give me a count of three, okay?" Steph said.

Elle kneeled and rested her chin on Steph's shoulder for a moment. She lingered there for longer than she should've, and if she swore if she stayed longer that black and white moth would crawl out of Steph's skin and flutter onto Elle's cheek. But Daphne always seemed to think she was too eager. So, now, she took her time.

Steph lightly patted Elle's head, a small indication of support.

"One, two..." Elle inhaled Steph's scent. "Three."

Blood dribbled down Steph's arm. She squirmed a little in her seat, but Elle held her down.

"Fuck," Steph breathed, bordering on a grunt.

A jolt of panic ran up Elle's stomach as Steph continued to let out a heavy sigh, unable to contain her pain. *This* was what Elle was terrified of: the awful, aphrodisiac quality of a feeding. She'd never thought much of it—*oh, the poison in your fangs just makes it easier to feed on the victim, yeah, typical vampire shit*—but now it was the only thing on her mind. Her body convulsed, fighting both the urge to drink and to throw up.

Steph tasted a dash like fresh mint leaves and herbs, an earthy quality that would've brought any vampire an easy feeding.

What is it like to hear someone beg? To have that power?

I don't know. Cathartic.

Elle drank for longer than she should have, but she tried to justify it in her head. When she pulled back, she licked up the leftovers that dribbled cleanly down the length of Daphne's arm in a small stream. Wouldn't want any of it on the sheets. Daphne, meanwhile, sat with her back straight, her body stiffened in response to the pain.

With a sigh, Elle collapsed onto the pillows, curled up on her side. Daphne, having shaken herself out of her trance, got up to pick up paper towels, first to wipe off herself, and then to hand some to Elle so she could wipe away any remains on her lips.

"Does it really not hurt that much?" Elle asked, looking up at Daphne, sitting at her office chair, scrubbing out a few spots of blood.

Daphne shrugged. "No. I guess not. I feel fine."

"You sure you don't want me to..."

"I'm good! I promise."

Quiet pervaded Daphne's room.

Elle continued to look at Daphne, who stared back. She couldn't make out the expression on her girlfriend's face, but it seemed to resemble a smile.

She knows that power.

More blood spilled down the plastic. It didn't taste too bad, carrying hints of strong cider. It stung a little. Maybe it had a hint of cinnamon. Mostly tasted like salt, though... like normal blood. Elle finished it off and ran a hand through her hair, patting out the stains. The red stuck to her fingers.

Elle moved onto the next bag, downing it faster than the first and making even more of a mess. Her landlord would kill her if any of it got the couch, but her feeding came as a priority, over any future consequences. Steph was right—once she got into this feeding frenzy, it was so much easier to consume anything. But, of course, she couldn't shake the thoughts of Daphne. Daphne was depriving her, yet if Elle had a single thought about how awful of a situation she was in, she would absolutely spiral even more.

Elle shrugged her shirt off to avoid more stains. Skirt too. One more blood bag, then she was done. No, one more after that.

Just one, two, three more.

Tears, snot, and blood slid down her neck and her chest.

Strangely, the thought of how Daphne had turned Elle on entered her head. She pushed it away. It came back. They'd always had sex afterwards because Elle asked to. That was when Daphne was most attentive to her, she'd train her eyes on Elle's skin before pressing her lips onto her thighs, her breasts, her collarbones.

Elle pressed her legs together.

She barely masturbated anymore. She couldn't, without drowning in more thoughts of Daphne that she wasn't allowed to have.

Elle gagged from drinking too fast, thick ropes of blood coughing out from her mouth. She mopped it up with her fingers and suckled it down again, ravished by the metallic taste sliding down her throat. So hungry. So, so terrible.

The Red Cross's medical bags were an awful compromise. They lacked that connection of fang to skin, the softness of the flesh that complimented the smoothness of blood. There had to be a science to it—some hormonal response elicited by human contact that came with feeding. The real thing was always, always better.

Elle coughed once, then let out a quiet sob. Feral, she squeezed the empty blood bag in her hands, her nails digging into the plastic.

You will never know. You will never feel okay.

How is this fair?

"Daphneeee," Elle whined.

"Hm?"

She reached her hands towards her girlfriend, motioning for her to come closer, code for please-fucking-cuddle-with-me. Daphne cocked her head for a moment, amused by Elle's cuteness, before getting up taking the position of big spoon.

The warmth of her body mixed with Elle's, all cozy. She tried to forget the anxiety she had walking here. The anxiety from last night, that text conversation full of kind, flattering words and twenty-minute response times. That video call, where Daphne rambled on about doing her economics homework, stressed out of her mind. It was all in Elle's head, that biting fear of being unloved—look at what Daphne was letting Elle do to her. This took love. This took *trust*.

"Do you wanna have sex later?" Daphne muttered.

"Yeah."

DANGER. HAZARDOUS LIQUIDS.

"How long were you guys together again?" Steph asked through her teeth, riding out the last of Elle's vampiric poison. Elle helped her clean up the wound.

"Half a year, I think." *Five months. To be precise, nine days from five months.* She wiped up a small dot with her index and middle fingers and licked it clean, sucking on her nails so she would leave absolutely no stains. It didn't taste any better than before. The inklings of a stomachache bubbled inside of her.

"Poor Elle," Daphne would've teased, ghosting her hand over Elle's skin. Flashes of their relationship passed through the tips of her imaginary nails. Movies. Dinner.

Stay, don't go. Ramen in the cold. Beer in the snow. Ritual. Cinema. Hyde Park.

Ramen in the cold. Beer in the snow. Stay, don't go. Stay, don't go.

Elle swallowed, set with heavy realization. "God, I'm awful. All I wanted was the blood. I can't get over the fucking blood."

"No, Elle, don't think that. It always tastes better when you like them." Steph paused. "Is there something else you wanted from her?"

"Just the--"

Steph crossed her arms.

Elle sighed shakily, wishing her tears could just shrink back into her eyes. She sat down on the wooden floor. Her body shook, knees tucked into her chest, arms hugging them. She coughed out a suppressed sob. "I wanted to make her tea afterwards, nurse her wounds, cuddle. She always insisted she didn't need any of that. I wish she did. I wanted to comfort her." More tears welled up. "That's still pretty selfish, isn't it?"

Steph paused, didn't say anything for a moment. Unable to find the words, maybe, just like any of other friends, who'd resorted to "fuck Daphne"'s and "you're gonna be fine"'s. Well, she wasn't fine at the moment. And she surely didn't hate Daphne.

"You might have to work that out yourself," Steph finally said.

Elle knew it. Steph couldn't help her at best and didn't want to help her at worst.

"Either way." Elle swallowed. "I just want her to talk to me."

Though even if she could, Elle wasn't sure if Daphne would ever ask how she felt.

She left me without so much. She gave me something so sacred.

Are you okay?

"Yeah, I'm okay. I'm fine."

She smiled, teeth showing.

The Book of Raul

By Rafique Shabbir



As a renowned linguist professor at the University of Yvan, I was selected to translate a manuscript recovered from the ancient ruins of Gador, the discovery of which excited the intellectual community across the lands of Ultara.

Gador was the capital city of the Raulian Empire which lasted about four hundred years and ended nearly half a millennia ago. Very few texts of the empire remain, for the libraries of most of its major cities were burned down when warring kingdoms invaded, nor have many oral accounts survived the passage of time.

When the expedition team searched the crumbled ruins of the palace, they found in the underground levels a secret trapdoor (the decayed state of the structure may have helped reveal its location). It was locked by a charm which the wizard of the company eventually diffused.

They descended deeper into the earth and came onto a tomb presumably housing the deceased bloodline of Raul Gador, who was the founder of the city and whose descendants succeeded his reign; within caskets, the mummified corpses slept. At the far end of the chamber, a skeleton draped in wine-red robes (presumably enchanted to prevent disintegration) was slumped against the wall. A book was cradled in its arms.

All of the artifacts retrieved are currently being studied at various academic institutions. A few linguist experts already attempted to translate the book, but their efforts were futile (I was almost insulted that the expedition team hadn't approached me first). The manuscript was now in my possession, about two hundred pages encased in purple leather binding with sinister, arabesque designs inscribed on the cover. It was in near-mint condition just like the robes.

Based on historical facts about the Raulian Empire and the circumstances surrounding the book's discovery, it is believed the skeleton belonged to the necromancer, Xur, close friend and generational advisor to the emperor and empresses of the royal line. During the Fall of Gador, he must have locked himself inside the tomb and remained there until his death. That much we can assume to be true with a certain degree of confidence; however, questions still linger. Why hadn't he returned to the outside world after the battle's end? What had prevented him from doing so? Was he wounded? Did the enemies inhabit the city long after it was sacked? The contents of the manuscript might provide the answers if the necromancer had documented his thoughts leading up to his dying moments—or perhaps not. Maybe the manuscript contained sacred scripture pertaining to the condemned goddess, Keziah, and other perverse entities; in which case, much would be revealed about the notorious necromancing community who operate in the dark. But I digress. The written words need to be translated first, and regardless of the findings, light shall be shed on knowledge previously obscured in shadows of unknown.

In my quarters, a bust of the High Goddess Yvani rested on the table alongside

a clutter of books and papers; on the walls hung the awards and diplomas achieved throughout my academic career. By candlelight, I cracked open the manuscript and commenced my study.

The penmanship was impeccable, but the characters themselves bore little to no resemblance with those of the compiled texts from around the same time frame of the Raulian Empire. However, the curvilinear stretches, acute angles, and skewed slant of the runes conjured an alien and magical aesthetic which reminded me of two translations I had conducted before; both involved deciphering the language of necromancy and earned me great scholarly recognition.

The procurement of those two texts (currently stored, along with the translated versions, in the university archives) was a miraculous accomplishment as practitioners of the dark arts lived secluded lives and hid their knowledge well from the public; to openly approach or attempt to intrude the dwellings of such persons was a foolhardy endeavor. How the texts in question were attained, I will spare the details of. One was a page from a set of instructions on how to brew a potion using the most obscene ingredients; the other was a fragment of a stone tablet with lines of prayer engraved on its surface.

From a drawer, I pulled out my rough notes for the two aforementioned translations which took laborious hours to produce, requiring consultation with fellow linguists as well as historians and wizards. I compared them with the manuscript before me. The exotic runes were identical, and any discrepancies, I conjectured, resulted from archaic versus contemporary scripts.

With giddy anticipation, I transcribed the title on the cover:
‘The Book of Raul.’

A surge of excitement elated my heart. I felt confident in my abilities to translate the manuscript with relative ease. Of course, the intricacies of the knowledge of necromancy were something I would have to grapple with. Another challenge I expected to face involved extrapolating certain words and letters since the translated syllabary I had constructed may be partially incomplete due to being based on a small sample of writing. Regardless, my prior experience made it so there was no better candidate for such a task than I.

While cross-referencing the manuscript and my notes, I scribbled on pieces of parchment the common-tongue interpretations. Methodically, I carried out this procedure and sank into a trance-like state.

The book started with the coronation ceremony of Raul Gador III, the prose written in the manner of a tale. I am sure many readers can attest to the power of words and their ability to conjure vivid images and perceptions like the illusions cast by a mage. As I continued with the translation, before my eyes, the words slowly lifted off the page and enlarged; like flames, they wavered and floated about the room, and when they

vanished into wisps of smoke, there materialized the very scene of the narrative.

The sun, an orb of blinding ivory, sizzled in the ocean-blue skies above, while below, the desert wastes simmered and the monumental city of Gador basked in the cascade of rays. Drums beat, trumpets sang in fanfare, and crowds cheered as the procession of the soon-to-be emperor, Raul Gador III, paraded through the streets.

Royal guards marched in synchrony, flanking the procession, spears glinting in the sunlight; the cavalry of horsemen clip-clopped upfront followed by columns of musicians; behind them, the open chariot of the Raulian prince himself rolled as he stood tall with pride, head up in the clouds.

All of this I observed in a shapeless, invisible, ethereal form from fixed vantage points while still subconscious of myself sitting at the desk, reading and writing in my quarters.

The parade halted in front of a golden, sandstone palace. With knights positioned by his sides, Raul Gador III ascended the steps and entered through the grand double doors swung open by his servants.

A red carpet rolled across the checkered floor of a pillared hall peopled by close friends, kinsmen, and other noble folk. He strode over to the throne before Xur the necromancer, who had a gaunt face with snake-like eyes that matched the color of his robes. Behind them, a statue of the condemned goddess Keziah loomed, the casted idol depicting her in human form, but long-lost ancient texts were rumored to tell of her true grotesque and alien appearance.

A crown of silver, twinkling like a band of stars, with a flaming ruby encrusted in the center, was capped upon the young prince's head. He and the necromancer stepped outside; when the gathered masses waiting by the front gates of the palace perceived the two, they erupted in roaring waves of cheer and hailed their new emperor.

Raul Gador III nodded and waved at the subjects before his feet. But a subtle change swept over the necromancer's face as he became aware of some unwanted presence nearby. He glanced back over his shoulder, eyes scanning to and fro until they fixated on me.

I couldn't tell whether there was malicious intent in his gaze but felt a dreadful urge to escape his scrutiny nonetheless. My surroundings dissolved into nothingness, and I snapped out of the spell.

I awoke, as if from a deep slumber, back in my quarters, sitting at my desk. My throat was parched. Sweat dotted my brow. I panted. Already, the details of the hallucinatory experience were fleeting my mind, like trying to remember a dream. I reckoned it must have been a dream inspired by the manuscript I was translating, for what other logical explanation could suffice? Yet even with this rationalization, a shadow of doubt cast over my mind.

I went outside for a stroll around campus, taking whiffs of the morning air but hardly found any respite from the stress of my studies. My thoughts were clouded by a vague impression as I recalled, with alarming clarity, the final image of the necromancer and felt his stare burning through the pages of time and landing on me. For an inexplicable reason, I returned to my quarters and resumed transcribing the manuscript.

Again, the same eldritch process played out, holding me spellbound; the words leaped out the page, my surroundings morphed, and I became a voyeur in the past, watching history through spectral lenses while still subconscious of my present self reading the book and scribbling the translation.

I witnessed the events and happenings during the life and tumultuous reign of Raul Gador III: the successful courting of Princess Irene of the Ebony Coast and the birth of their daughter, Raulia Gador II, the political affairs which involved trying to re-establish trust between the state and its people, whose relations were dampened by war and poverty, and the devastating battles against invading kingdoms, where the clamor of men reached the ears of the gods in Heaven and Hell.

Throughout most of the scenes, the necromancer Xur was present, whether as a caretaker to the emperor's heir, a spokesperson representing the government during political hearings, or a warlord wreaking arcane havoc upon the battlefield. Occasionally, he seemed to purposefully glance in my direction but otherwise, never acknowledged my presence.

As the pages turned, the empire crumbled, both from outside and within, like castles of sand in the wind and the rain. Gador was under siege by the Drekians of the North as they ravaged the streets, killing civilians and soldiers alike; the city's remaining forces desperately tried to fend off the attack.

Inside the palace, Raul Gador III and Xur conversed among themselves in the very hall where the coronation ceremony had taken place so many pages ago, the glory of the empire a dimming star about to go out in a blaze. Since the start of his reign, the emperor had grown old and weary; wrinkles creased his face, his hair was thin and gray. But the necromancer appeared to have hardly aged at all, yet those eyes of crimson glinted with wisdom of yore.

"My empire burns," began Raul in a somber tone. "It is only a matter of time before those savages reach the palace and slay me, my wife, and daughter. Please, tell me you have concocted a means to save us from utter ruin—or at least save my family lineage. Xur, what am I to do? I am lost without your guidance," so he pleaded, eyes brimming with tears.

The necromancer sighed, his remorse tangible, and started pacing around the room, looking down at his feet as if pondering complex notions.

"Today, Gador shall fall," the intonations of his voice drummed, "and your family

lineage wiped out, thus marking the beginning of the end. There is little we can do to prevent this from happening now. However, tomorrow, the Raulian Empire may rise again and resume its reign for centuries to come with you and your descendants at the head.”

Raul squinted and raised an eyebrow. “How?”

Xur continued, “I have yet to inform you, but ever since the day of your coronation, I have been wary of the presence of a peculiar, ethereal entity watching us from time to time.”

Raul’s eyes darted around. “Is it watching us now?”

“Indeed,” answered the necromancer. As if he had a third eye, I felt him staring in my direction. Even as he paced about, he seemed to avoid stepping near the spot my spectral body was situated. A cold shiver permeated throughout my being, but I remained viewing the scene, partly spellbound by forces unknown while also intrigued to see what happens next.

“What is it?” asked Raul.

“Such is the question I posed to the Great Keziah herself. Being devious-minded, she answered only in cryptic riddles for me to decipher as a test of my wits. Pondering her words, I consulted various texts, communed with spirits of nether, and have reached the following conclusion.”

He turned to face the emperor, gazing almost absent-mindedly. “Centuries from today, a book whose words have been interwoven with spells is presently—in the future—being read by someone who, under the effect of the incantations, has been observing us. As it is being read and understood, the cosmic forces needed to alter our fates are slowly being set into motion.”

Raul’s brow narrowed, and he shook his head. “I don’t understand.”

“And I’m afraid you never will,” said Xur, placing a hand on his shoulder. “Even the true extent of Great Keziah’s power is far beyond the comprehension of mere mortals such as you and I. But trust me, just as your ancestors have, and everything might go accordingly to her will.”

Raul nodded, somewhat hesitantly. “Then what will you do?”

“I have written part of the book thus far and will finish the rest soon enough. The process of embedding spells into text is intricate and tedious. I shall hide in the Royal Tomb where the enemy will never find me, and, in another age, long after my death, hopefully, the completed manuscript will be uncovered and the loop of time closed.”

Once more, he nodded, looking still quite unsure but his faith resolute. “And what about I?”

“Rally your soldiers and make a final stand. If the Raulian Empire falls, then our enemies will fall with us.”

Raul kneeled before the necromancer and gave a solemn bow. “I shall do as you say. Goodbye, old friend.”

Xur placed a comforting hand on his head. “Farewell for now.”

At this moment, the scene vanished, and the senses returned to my present self as the last word was transcribed. Then, on the blank pages of the manuscript, new words began inscribing themselves. Again, I was pulled into the same trance, reading the phantom-scribed text while my hand tirelessly wrote the translation.

This time, I entered a dreamless stupor where premature conceptions relating to the unfathomable laws of the universe plagued my mind and conjured sensations both awesome and frightening. Somehow, I conceived that history was rewritten: Raul Gador III, against unfavorable odds, prevented his city from being sacked and went on to lead multiple military campaigns until the opposing armies were quelled. A chain of events set off and displaced the present day where the borders of Ultara no longer were divided as before, and certain deities descended and passed unheard by humanity. The Raulian Empire, under the reign of the descendants of Gador, expanded and thrived for the centuries to come...

Waking from what felt like a slumber of thousands of years, my vision cleared as the darkness dissolved. The final few words of the manuscript wavered and settled on the page. My wits were dizzied and in disarray as I struggled to grasp the full meaning of the precognitions from the feverish episode.

I discerned that I was back in my quarters, only a shadow of unfamiliarity hung over it. The furnishings were arranged differently than I recalled, and the room appeared smaller; on the desk sat a bust of the condemned goddess Keziah, depicting her in human form, while pinned to the walls were my academic awards and diplomas, some of which accredited to me by the University of Raul.

The realization hit, but the full horror sank in when the door swung open. There stood before me a figure clad in wine-red robes whose crimson eyes flared with satisfaction; a cunning smile was etched upon his ageless face.

THE END





NON-FICTION



Schizophrenic Mentality versus Magical Reality in Bessie Head's Maru

By Marissa Lee



Through *Maru*, Bessie Head “longed to write an enduring novel on the hideousness of racial prejudice,” and simultaneously, a book “so beautiful and so magical that [she], as a writer, would long to read and re-read it” (Head xi-xii). To this end, she utilizes the village of Dilepe as a microcosm of Botswana’s racialized postcolonial culture. Her protagonist, Margaret, is a Maserwa teacher caught within Dilepe’s dominant cultural binaries, unable to fit comfortably within its cultural framework. In “Irony and schizophrenia in Bessie Head’s ‘Maru,’” Modupe Olaogun frames the novel’s ambiguities through the analogy of schizophrenia. In *Maru*, the schizophrenic analogy presents primarily in the fact that “the dominant images of these characters, and of the society they represent, are above all those of ambiguity” (Olaogun 1).

On a societal level, Margaret’s educational status differentiates her from other Maserwa people, the rest of whom work as slaves. On an individual level, Margaret’s thoughts also transcend the boundaries of reality when Maru telepathically shares images of their future together, which Margaret translates into her paintings. However, a schizophrenic analysis of *Maru* risks framing the story’s racial hierarchies as merely abstract concepts. While the analogy of schizophrenia motions toward the possibility of liberation for Margaret, a magical realist reading makes *Maru*’s Maserwa liberation concrete by rooting Margaret’s precarious identities within the racial and historical realities of postcolonial Botswana, rather than relegating them strictly to the realm of the mind, where a schizophrenic analysis confines them.

Olaogun defines schizophrenia as “a term applied to a form of psychosis in which there is a cleavage of the mental functions, association with the assumption by the affected person of a second personality” (1-2). However, Olaogun is careful to differentiate schizophrenia from mere “madness” or “insanity” (2). Instead, the schizophrenic analogy is applied to societies with “dichotomous tendencies” such as racial binaries, or in the case of individuals, “‘a public face’ versus ‘a private face’” (2). Applied to *Maru*, the “ambiguities, polyphonies, binaries, and the misrecognition of the manifest and the concealed in [the novel’s] Botswana setting” make Dilepe’s racial culture schizophrenic (3). Most affected by this ‘schizophrenia’ is Margaret, a Maserwa woman who is constantly ostracized from the racial binaries between Dilepe’s Botswanan and San peoples. Olaogun describes this sense of unbelonging as a “colonial dimension of social” and historical “neurosis” (5). As a Maserwa person, Margaret is of the lowest racial caste, and faces constant discrimination throughout the novel—even by her closest confidant, Dikeledi (Head 61). Margaret is also unable to interact with any other San people during the story. Comparatively, she also occupies a position of relative privilege; instead of working as a slave as other Maserwa people

do, Margaret teaches at the local school, and is the romantic interest of two of Dilepe's most important royalty, Moleka and Maru. Margaret's liminal position between the highest and lowest castes reflects the ways that her San status alienates her from the royalty she surrounds herself with, but equally, how her approximation to this royalty disconnects her from the struggles of the San people to whom she cannot relate.

As a result of her unbelonging, Margaret occupies a sort of shadowed position (69, Olaogun 2). In the novel, she is literally called “a shadow behind which lived another personality of great vigor and vitality. She raised her hand to hide the second image from sight, but the two constantly tripped up each other” (Head 50). The ostracizing effect of Margaret’s shadowed stance—a liminal, almost-personhood—culminates in a feeling that one occupies an “untenable position,” where one is unable to “make a move or make no move, without being beset by contradictory and paradoxical pressures and demands, push and pull” (Olaogun 2). For Olaogun, this rings true both for individuals with schizophrenia, and for Margaret in particular. Throughout much of *Maru*, the contradictory demands placed on Margaret are external—more specifically, racial and cultural. But Olaogun points to other moments where these contradictory demands become internal; namely, in the moments of *Maru* where mentality and reality are blurred (2).

This internalization occurs most poignantly when Margaret completes her paintings: “thirty sheets of seemingly neat, detached activity” (Head 76). When Margaret first begins her paintings, the rhythm of her life becomes “totally disrupted, and another rhythm replace[s] it which [makes] day and night merge into a restless fever,” a merging that mirrors the blurring of mentality and reality in these scenes (74). This restless fever “had a beginning like the slow build-up of a powerful machine but once it had started (...) there was no escape from the tremendous pressure,” nor from the “images and forms” that she saw (74). Olaogun posits that Margaret’s mental processes mirror those of others who experience schizophrenia, such as the “shadowy land” of merging day and night, and the “waking nightmares,” which characterize her feverish period (Olaogun 2). The imagery of the machine is also important to the schizophrenic analogy: “‘schizoanalysts,’ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, employ the image of the productive machine to describe the schizophrenic experience, which, according to them, symbolizes a form of freedom” (6). In this context, then, the schizophrenic analogy “becomes a construct for a disturber of an accepted though oppressive situation,” a remedy for the ‘untenable situation’ created by the racial dualities and binary demands Margaret faces (6).

Thus far, the schizophrenic analogy appears to match Margaret’s experiences and characterization in *Maru*. Head uses similar language to describe Margaret’s

experience as Olaogun does when quoting individuals with schizophrenia, and Olaogun's emphasis on ambiguity and duality highlights the tension surrounding Dilepe's racial caste system—and the tension that Margaret's character places upon it. Yet, the schizophrenic analogy leaves something out. Olaogun also argues that “*Maru* sometimes endows words with a magical potency...” (Olaogun 5). Reading *Maru* as a magical realist text, it becomes evident that this “magical potency” exceeds the schizophrenic analogy. The schizophrenic framework allows for this possibility through the image of the machine and its implications, but schizophrenia places these dualities and ambiguities in the mind. In contrast, reading *Maru* as a magical realist text incorporates the magical elements of Margaret's character and cognition into the concrete realities of a historically colonial racial-cultural structure, thereby better acknowledging these realities as real structures, instead of abstract figments.

Maggie Ann Bowers' *Magic(al) Realism* emphasizes that the magical realist genre “relies most of all upon the matter-of-fact, realist tone of its narrative when presenting magical happenings” (Bowers 3). Like the schizophrenic analogy, “magical realism is often considered to be a disruptive narrative mode,” capable of challenging “the notion[s] of history” (3). Yet, while schizophrenia is characterized by the presence of ambiguities and binaries, magical realism “fuses [its] two opposing aspects [...] (the magical and the realist) together to form one new perspective” (3). In other words, while the schizophrenia analogy acknowledges the binaries present in *Maru* (and in Margaret in particular), a magical realist reading exceeds this analogy by reframing these binaries and, at least partially, dissolving them. For this reason, “the extraordinary in magical realism is rarely presented in the form of a dream or a psychological experience because to do so takes the magic out of recognizable material reality and places it into the little understood world of the imagination” (22). In *Maru*, Head subverts schizophrenic ambiguities and binaries through the use of the painting, and the ‘vision’, both of which are also grounded in reality as a callback to the opening passages.

When she describes her paintings to Dikeledi, Margaret tells her that the “strange” mental pictures were ones that she had never seen before (Head 77). However, these images were not new to *Maru*'s readers. These mental pictures—the house, the “wide open sky and field,” the dark clouds, the daisies—mirror the images that comprise the opening passages of the novel, where they were physically, tangibly real (1-2). These images come from the future; Maru has planted images of his future with Margaret into her mind (78). No one questions the legitimacy of these images. Dikeledi knows immediately that Maru transmitted these images to Margaret, and while that is technically ‘unreal’ in that it would be realistically impossible, in the

scope of the story, it is not questioned—nor is Margaret’s sanity. The assumption of truth and reality in these scenes contrasts the “dissonances” and “cacophonous” contradicting voices experienced by individuals who have experienced schizophrenia (Olaogun 2).

The inevitability of her visions is not questioned either, despite these fever-laden scenes blurring the lines between reality and hallucination. The novel’s description of the days-long fever feels akin to a kind of manic episode, while Olaogun compares the episode to a “schizophrenic dissociation” (8). But, the fact that these images become Margaret’s reality affirms that these magical elements in the story are concretely incorporated into the real. By starting the novel at the end of Margaret’s story and connecting her visions to the reality she will later inhabit, Head primes readers to see Margaret’s visions as real premonitions of her future, not as dissociations or hallucinations.

Contrasting magical realism and surrealism, Maggie Ann Bowers asserts that “conjuring ‘magic’ is brought about by tricks that give the illusion that something extraordinary has happened, whereas in magic(al) realism it is assumed that something extraordinary *really* has happened” (Bowers 19). Applied to the schizophrenic analogy, it can be said that schizophrenia conjures ‘magic’ in the mind of the individual experiencing it. Olaogun appears to confirm this in their essay when they explain that “schizophrenics lack sound judgment,” and therefore, the ability to distinguish what is ‘real’ and ‘unreal,’ as “the voices they hear remain cacophonous, with no hierarchy in their plurality” (Olaogun 2). However, these voices are “not all that random;” in fact, “in a radical sense, schizophrenia may be seen as a disturber of accepted, though oppressive, conditions” (3). In *Maru*, such conditions—the racial post-colonial histories of Botswana, and *Maru*’s Dilepe—are very real.

At the end of the story, the Masarwa people are freed from their shadowed-space, and the story ends with “their humanity awakened” (Head 94). This ending is ultimately dependent on Margaret’s marrying Maru, which is itself predicated on Margaret receiving Maru’s transmitted images. In turn, these events create the scenes in *Maru*’s opening passages, where Margaret is, ultimately, physically liberated. If Margaret’s visions had only been “schizophrenic dissociations” instead of real glimpses into her future, her liberation—and the liberation of the Masarwa people—would have been impossible; as a result, the story would fail to be the disruptive political analysis that Bessie Head sought to write (Olaogun 8, Head xi). Thus, while the schizophrenic analogy effectively highlights the binaries and ambiguities inherent in *Maru*’s Margaret, and the setting of Dilepe, it is a magical realist reading that brings Head’s political and postcolonial motivations into relief.

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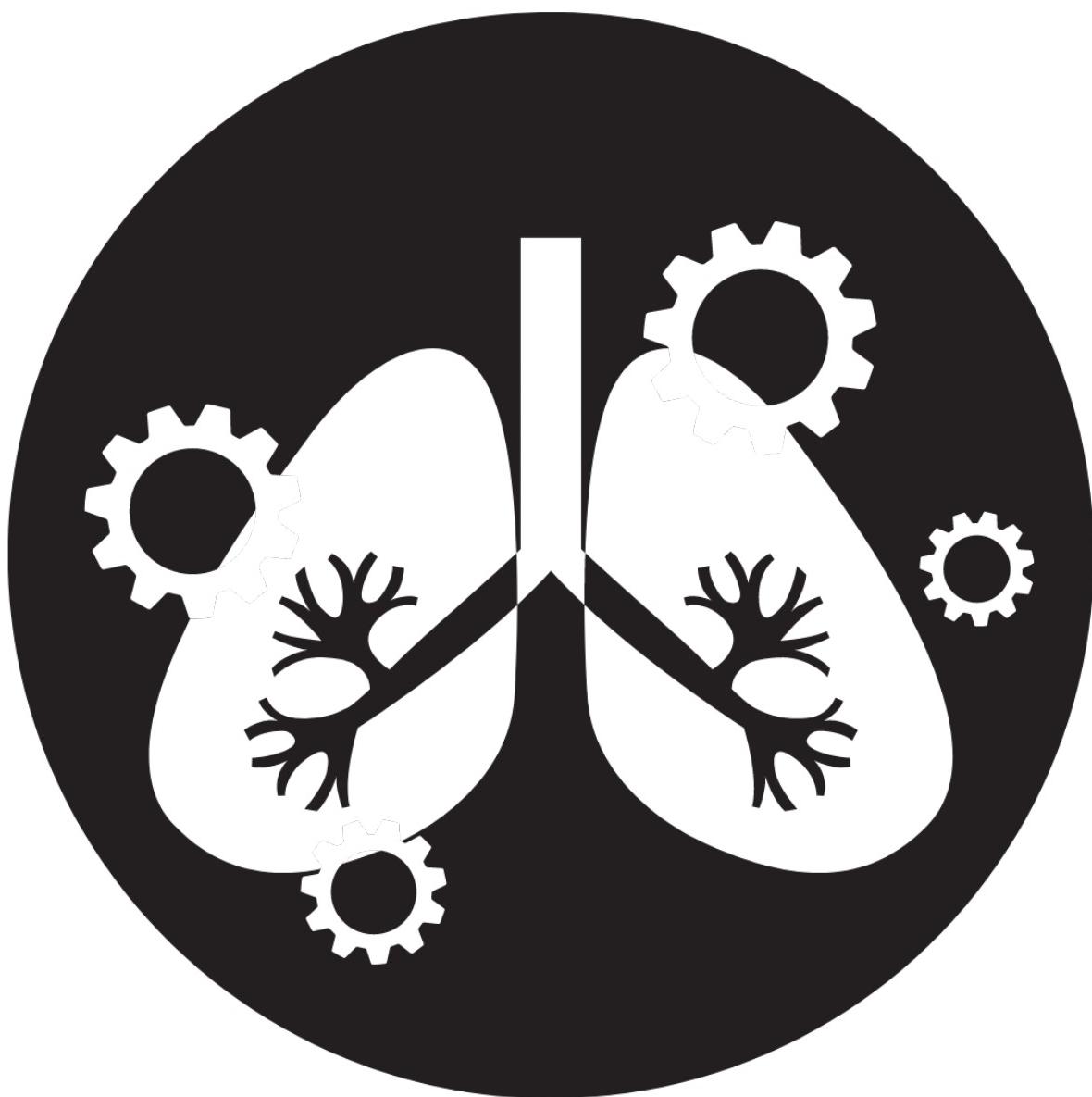
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Dystopian Commodification or Hope for Humanization? Memoir and Narrative in Kazuo Ishiguro's Never Let Me Go

By Marissa Lee



Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* is one of many stories that incorporate human clones, but Ishiguro's clones are not of the garden variety. Instead, they are distinctly human(oid). So human, in fact, that "the shock for *NLMG*'s readers comes not from realizing that the clones are human, but that these humans are clones" (Shaddox 453). Ishiguro's clones are reduced to mechanized parts of the capitalist system, both as machines and as the individual cogs that keep those machines running. They "occupy the liminality between human and nonhuman. Clones are capable of providing life-sustaining organs to humans, yet they are unable to reproduce and are othered to the degree that they are incarcerated by the panoptic society in which they exist" (Cannella 110). Biologically, the clones die as they lose their final organs to forced donations, require medical care by doctors and nurses, and age like any other human does. Emotionally, each character has a personality so vivid that it is all but impossible not to see your own relationships playing out through Kathy's narration. The most mechanical aspect of the clones is the scientific language used in reference to them: terms such as "complete" in place of "die," and "donation" as a euphemistic alternative for "forced vital organ removal procedures" (Bizzini 74). At first glance, Ishiguro's decision to frame the clones as human appears strange. Given that the clones are bred to provide organs to human recipients, why must the clones complete after four—sometimes fewer—donations? In the novel's capitalist context, would it not be more useful for them to regenerate their organs indefinitely? If their sole purpose is organ donation, why would Ishiguro equip them with such deeply human emotions and intellects?

Never Let Me Go has been assigned several generic titles, including science-fiction, "alternate realism" (Rollins 250), and "speculative fiction" (Sen 97), but the crucial generic question concerns the novel's dystopian status. In *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, Graham J. Murphy defines Dystopia as "negative utopia ... 'a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which the reader lived'" (Murphy 473). Dystopia does not enact the same "evacuation of eutopian hope" as anti-utopia (473). Instead, it "[makes] make room for its reconsideration and refunctioning in even the worst of times" (Murphy 473). Some scholars posit that, through preserving and reconstructing her memories through memoir, Kathy not only preserves the identities and lives of her friends who died but also constructs an identity for herself outside of her clonehood. However, despite its humanizing effect, others see her memoir as inadequate; while it preserves her friends' memories, it does not, ultimately, keep them alive. There are many ways that Kathy's story can be read as one of hope, despite its despair, but whether or not the reader can glimpse these hopeful moments depends on their willingness to empathize with Kathy,

instead of commodifying her. Refusing to see hope in Kathy's story, or at the very least in the act of her memoir, implicates the reader in the same systems of commodification that Ishiguro and Kathy critique. While it is difficult to see Kathy's fate as anything but anti-utopian by the end of the story, the reader is in a unique position to afford Kathy the personhood that she was denied throughout the story, by seeing the power in her memoir and taking it seriously as an act of subversion.

Before analyzing Marxist themes in *Never Let Me Go*, it is pertinent to review some key components of Marxist theory, as defined by Christian Fuchs. Fuchs first defines capitalist society as "a form of society that is shaped by the logic of accumulation" (72) of capital: "money that is invested into the production of commodities so that a monetary profit is generated" (61). "Commodities" refers to the objects being produced for profit, but a commodity's fundamental purpose is satisfying "human needs" (39). A capitalist society is shaped by the exploitative relationship between the working class and the capitalist class. Two factors contribute to the exploitation of the labouring class. First, the labouring class produces commodities that generate capital for the capitalist class, but not themselves. Second, the labouring class has no control over their product; Marx calls this phenomenon "alienation" (Fuchs 129).

In *Never Let Me Go*, capital is (human) life, and the clones are both products and producers. They are labourers, the working class exploited by human capitalists, but they are also commodities. In the machinic metaphor of capitalism, the labourer "is no longer instituted as an 'individuated subject' or 'citizen.' He is instead considered a gear, [or] a piece... rather than a person within the "welfare-state" assemblage and its collective institutions (schools, hospitals, museums, theaters, television, Internet, etc.)" (Alcala 41). In *Never Let Me Go*, the clones are machines, and their organs are cogs. Donors "on a fourth" (who have lived to make a fourth donation) are given special treatment. A donor "who's been pretty unpopular up till then, is treated with special respect," both by other clones and by "doctors and nurses" who "play up to this" (Ishiguro 278). This differential treatment demonstrates that clones are only valued as commodities and that the more of themselves they surrender, the more value they are assigned. Even at Hailsham, staff and guardians compare the students to animals. Kathy and her friends posit that Madame is scared of them "in the same way someone might be afraid of spiders" (Ishiguro 35), and when Kathy and Tommy see her near the novel's end, she calls them "poor creatures" (Ishiguro 254). Finally, the clones are alienated from their labour in that they do not live to see the product of their donations. The clones never know who receives their organs, yet "they are obligated to relinquish" them anyhow (Rollins 351).

As a carer, Kathy is exploited for her labour, but she remains an agent (rather

than an object) in the capitalist system, even if her only purpose is to gain profit for the capitalist class. When we meet Kathy, we learn that she seems to base much of her identity in her care work (Ishiguro 3): “My name is Kathy H. I’m thirty-one years old, and I’ve been a carer now for eleven years. That sounds long enough, I know, but actually they want me to go on for another eight months, until the end of this year” (Ishiguro 3). The only reason that she is not a donor is because of her aptitude as a carer. She is deemed a good carer because her “donors have always tended to do much better than expected. Their recovery times have been impressive, and hardly any of them have been classified as “agitated,” even before fourth donation” (Ishiguro 3). In other words, she is good at keeping her donors in line. This anecdote reveals less about Kathy as a person than it does the “modulating capacity” underpinning her “care work to produce a certain kind of amenable subjectivity...that will ultimately maximize the cost-efficiency of the entire cycle of donations” (Alcala 38). Like her donors, though, she is still alienated because her donors die no matter how well she cares for them (Ishiguro 207). Ultimately, she only exists because she facilitates profit for the capitalist class. As soon as she stops, she will become a donor herself, disassembled like her friends.

Mark Rollins’ analysis of the novel uncovers a crucial aspect of Kathy’s conditioning: the language used to describe the clones and their work. Specifically, “carer” and “donation” frame their work as voluntary “gift giving” rather than forced labour (Rollins 351). Rollins cites Lewis Hyde’s notion of gift-giving, which dictates that “gifts cannot be purchased or acquired through acts of will. Rather, they must be bestowed...Unlike the purchase of commodities, gifts are given with no assurance that something will be received in return, and the receipt or conferral of a gift establishes an emotional relationship...between the people involved” (Rollins 351). Donations are gifts and, because the clones cannot choose to donate their organs, under Hyde’s framework of gift-giving, the clones cannot be “true donors” (351). However, calling the clones donors “conditions them to regard the surrender of their organs as acts of generosity” and conceals the extent of their alienation from the products of their labour. The word “acts” also implies a sense of agency, in that it makes the clones out to be actors, rather than commodities. Additionally, the emotional latency of gift-giving detracts from the reality that the clones are wholly alienated from their labour when they complete. “Carer” is similarly euphemistic. Per Rollins’ analysis, “the term ‘carer’ masks the actual purpose of the clones’ work and conditions clones like Kathy to confuse forced labor for gift labor” (Rollins 352). Under Fuchs’ Marxist framework, carers would be considered public service workers, and thereby part of the exploited working class (Fuchs 113).

Kathy uses this same euphemistic language in her memoir, but she counteracts its dehumanizing effect by focusing on the emotional meaning and consequences underpinning the clones' lives and work. She may introduce herself as a carer, but her memoir is a detailed and intimate account of her coming-of-age which encompasses far more than the details of her work. In a sense, her memoir transcends her cloneness altogether; she talks mostly about universally relatable things—like her bonds with her friends and the complicated emotions she grappled with as an adolescent—rather than the material realities of clonehood. After all, the first thing she tells us is her name (Ishiguro 3). Even though she uses words like “carer” and “donation,” she does not define these words for readers, and we are tempted to gloss over them in rapture as we listen to her recount her childhood (3-4). By immersing the reader in her memories, Kathy humanizes herself and her friends, and puts herself and readers on an equal playing field. However, Kathy’s memory is not always reliable.

Morgan Cannella argues that Kathy’s memory is inadequate in conveying “a complete, reliable, posthuman narrative” (Cannella 92) because Kathy “can only offer her audience what she remembers, which she readily and often admits is incomplete and unreliable” she becomes an unreliable narrator (114). Kathy is open about her misremembering. She often remembers situations differently from her friends (Ishiguro 82), and as she narrates, Kathy discounts her own recollections in favour of theirs with comments like “maybe I’m remembering it wrong” (8), “I might have some of it wrong” (13), or even “maybe I’ve exaggerated it in my mind” (77). Her use of passive voice (“I have”) makes her seem even less assertive, further compromising the reader’s trust. Despite its potentially humanizing impact, Kathy’s memoir does not save her friends’ lives; in this way, Cannella may be right about the inadequacy of Kathy’s memory.

But in the words of Silvia Bizzini, “memory is not the only aspect of storytelling” (Bizzini 69). Karl Shaddox similarly acknowledges Kathy’s precarious memory but maintains that her narrative commentary on her fallible memory “puts the reader on notice that he should not expect direct knowledge, not an infallible view of events, but Kathy’s emotional responses to them” (Shaddox 454). Narration compensates for lapses in memory by paying equal attention to all sides of a given story, weighing each option with care and detail. Kathy is clear and honest about not only the things that she does not remember but also about the things that she is certain about. She alternatively uses phrases like “My guess is that,” (Ishiguro 20, 49) “I remember,” (26) and “As far as I remember” (62) to identify her differing degrees of certainty throughout her story. She also accounts for the fact that she is viewing her childhood experience through a grown-up lens: “If these incidents now seem full of significance

and all of a piece, it's probably because I'm looking at them in light of what came later" (79). She also takes a lot of care in the way that she directs her story by using signposts such as "As I've said" (32, 131) and "the point is" (62, 65, 127) to control the flow and progression of her narrative.

Her meticulous narration carries into her temporal organization. Kathy tells the story mostly chronologically but often moves back and forth between scenes and time periods. She will introduce a topic with "I want to talk about," but clarify that she will "first have to go back a bit, to give you the background" (138) or say, "that's another story I'll come to later" (64). Kathy's use of second-person pronouns also changes throughout the story. She uses second-person pronouns in two ways. First, in an abstract or metaphorical reference, like when she recounts conversations with her guardians at Hailsham: "You've been told about it. You're students. You're... *special*" (69). She also uses "you" in what seems like a more direct reference to the reader: "I'm sure somewhere in your childhood, you too had an experience like ours that day; similar if not in the actual details then inside, in the feelings" (Ishiguro 36). This particular use of second-person pronouns is important in its emphasis on the universal framing of "inside, in the feelings" as a point of relation between clones and readers. Broadly, both uses serve to connect the reader directly to Kathy and her friends, calling readers to step into her shoes. Kathy's careful narration and thorough contextualization show that she is perfectly reliable, telling her story in the way that she wants to. Calling her "unreliable" also dismantles her agency, which itself contributes to her commodification.

Still, Kathy does not contextualize everything. She does not define "carer," "donation," or "complete" outright, even though she takes the time to explain Exchanges and Sales as if they were unfamiliar concepts (16). Exchanges and Sales seem like mundane events compared to "donations" and "completion" (3-4), but Kathy sees her role as a carer (and her fellow clones' roles as donors) as humanizing, and it gives them a sense of identity and purpose. Her job "means a lot" to her, "especially that bit about my donors staying 'calm'" (3), which reveals the depth of her capitalist conditioning. In contrast, she looks back on the Sales and Exchanges as "a bit odd" (17). "If we were so keen on a person's poetry" at an Exchange, she poses, "why didn't we just borrow and copy it down ourselves any old afternoon?" (17). While this feels ironic to the reader, it makes sense to point out that Kathy and the clones have been specifically bred to serve the purposes of humans and to see their work as humanizing. As Shaddox notes, "the substance of Kathy's personal journal, as she advises the reader, is 'not in the actual details [but] inside, in the feelings'" (455). Kathy explicitly states that what she wants from her memoir is "to get straight all the things that

happened between me and Tommy and Ruth after we grew up and left Hailsham” (Ishiguro 37); she wants to capture and keep alive the memories of her friends. So, what is important to Kathy’s narrative is capturing her and her friends’ humanity, not their factual correctness.

By the end of the novel, Kathy’s work reunites her with her dearest friends, as she cares for both Ruth and Tommy during some of their last donations. However, the novel’s closing scene is not a happy ending. Travelling to Norfolk by herself, she reflects on her completed friends, and her own position:

There was a fence keeping me from stepping into the field, with two lines of barbed wire... All along the fence, especially along the lower line of wire, all sorts of rubbish had caught and tangled. It was like the debris you get on a sea-shore: the wind must have carried some of it for miles and miles before finally coming up against these trees and these two lines of wire. Up in the branches of the trees, too, I could see, flapping about, torn plastic sheeting and bits of old carrier bags. That was the only time, as I stood there, looking at that strange rubbish, feeling the wind coming across those empty fields, that I started to imagine just a little fantasy thing, because this was Norfolk after all, and it was only a couple of weeks since I’d lost him. I was thinking about the rubbish, the flapping plastic in the branches, the shore-line of odd stuff caught along the fencing, and I half-closed my eyes and imagined this was the spot where everything I’d ever lost since my childhood had washed up, and I was now standing here in front of it, and if I waited long enough, a tiny figure would appear on the horizon across the field, and gradually get larger until I’d see it was Tommy, and he’d wave—maybe even call. The fantasy never got beyond that—I didn’t let it—and though the tears rolled down my face, I wasn’t sobbing it out of control. I just waited a bit, then turned back to the car, to drive off to wherever it was I was supposed to be. (287-288)

This last monologue contradicts Kathy’s desire to keep her friends with her and keep their memories alive. Despite her intention to gain closure with her friends, the divide between them is bigger than ever. Ruth’s death leaves “a line” (285) between Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy and in Kathy’s final vision of him, Tommy remains out of Kathy’s reach when she “doesn’t let” herself get “out of control” (288). Ruth and Tommy both “complete” before the novel’s end—Ruth after only two donations—and “for all of Kathy’s initial protestations that ‘carers aren’t machines,’ Kathy ‘projects her promise of boundless servility and reiteration’ onto the reader, implicating [them] in this dynamic of infinite labor” (Alcala 56-57). Kathy’s role as a carer also deepens the divide between her and Tommy. Near the end of their relationship, they fight often about Kathy not understanding his feelings as a donor, and he asks for a new carer

before his fourth donation (282). Like she does with her donors, she stops herself from becoming “agitated,” but sacrifices her humanity in the process (3).

Kathy has come full circle, counter-clockwise. While her narrative succeeds in humanizing herself and her friends, she is now trash, an object not even worth commodification. There does not seem to be any hope for Kathy, who despondently drives off to “wherever it was I was supposed to be” (288). No longer taking pride in her role as a carer, Kathy dehumanizes herself as she turns from commodified labourer into commodity object. At this point, there is no sense of hope and seemingly no point in holding out for any.

But the novel’s ending—and the events leading up to it—leave the story more open than it initially appears. Her return to Norfolk allows her to “see” Tommy one last time after she “heard” he “had completed” (287). The last time they were in Norfolk, she and Tommy found her lost Judy Bridgewater tape, and Ruth made her teenaged promise of getting the three friends together on “a road trip to some wild place,” like “the bogs” one day; a promise that Ruth keeps when she persuades Kathy to take her and Tommy to see the infamous boat (Ishiguro 201). Even the image of Kathy as trash keeps her connected to Tommy and Ruth. During their boat trip (their last trip together), the scenery of the expansive lake mirrors the water Tommy pictures himself “splashing through” whenever he won in football (285). Kathy’s meditation on the trash-filled water also reflects Ruth’s dream about the “rubbish”-filled water filling Hailsham—“just like a giant lake” nonetheless (225). These connections may not bring her friends back, but they do keep them with her. With her friends in her memories, “no one can take” them away from her (287). It won’t matter if they’ve already completed, because they will be with her through the end of her life as she was for them.

It would be easy for readers to give up on Kathy, to relinquish her humanity and to see her as trash. But if we accept the end of the novel as the anti-utopian end of her story, we participate in the same commodification that both Kathy and Ishiguro critique. Kathy is “not [a] machine,” finally broken down by the tragedies of the novel (4). Even if she is commodified as a carer, we can make the choice to see her as Kathy H. Lisa Fluet argues similarly: “the clone, like the not-quite-human narrators and immaterial laborers of his other novels, offers a challenge to identification as the organizing critical principle behind ‘what we do with characters’ and a way to ‘bypass the tradition in which literary characters only represent- in which all that characterization does is memorialize a series of institutionally sanctioned versions of what ‘the self’ is or should be’” (Fluet 285). The end of the novel shows that Kathy’s future is not in her hands. However, the construction of her story is in her hands

and by page four of the novel, Kathy is already beyond grappling with her own personhood. So, if we allow ourselves to see Kathy's humanity, we leave space (both in her memoir and in her future) for dystopian hope.

Returning to Murphy's dystopia, one element warrants re-attention: “[Dystopia] continues to embody utopianism by kicking the darkness until it bleeds daylight and to critique timely political issues while also locating hope in perhaps unexpected places: sites of resistance both within the narrative and, perhaps more importantly, within those readers who heed its warnings” (Murphy 477). Kathy and her friends were born and made to be material commodities, even their art was a commodity. Kathy's memoir is not. This is not writing that she is submitting to an Exchange or something that can be bought in a Sale. In fact, the materiality of Kathy's memoir is never discussed in the novel. It is not about the material circumstances (when or where she wrote it, its shape), because the materiality of the clones is also their least important feature. Instead, Kathy focuses on her relationships, on her humanity, on her personhood. That humanity is where we should be looking, too.

The clones' art cannot, and ultimately did not, reveal their interiority of their souls in a way that subverted their futures as donors. But that was the fault of the guardians, not the students: “Madame, Miss Emily, and the guardians work to reform how the donation system is run but not to eliminate it. They work to improve how the clones are treated but not to prevent what becomes of them” (Rollins 355). Not quite commodities themselves, the guardians held the unenviable responsibility of working against a system that shaped every part of their lives, and for Shaddox, “The individual character of empathic humanization,” and specifically, “the achievement of Kathy’s narrative as a means to humanize the clone” extends to the guardians, whom Kathy regularly frames as “well-meaning but ultimately misguided” in their advocacy for their students (Shaddox 464). As readers, we are in the privileged position to be unbound by the society of *Never Let Me Go*. We have the power to either commodify or humanize Kathy and her memoir, her final gift to us. Hopefully, her memoir can convince the reader to see her differently than the guardians ever did, as human instead of creature. And more importantly, with a future shaped by possibility.

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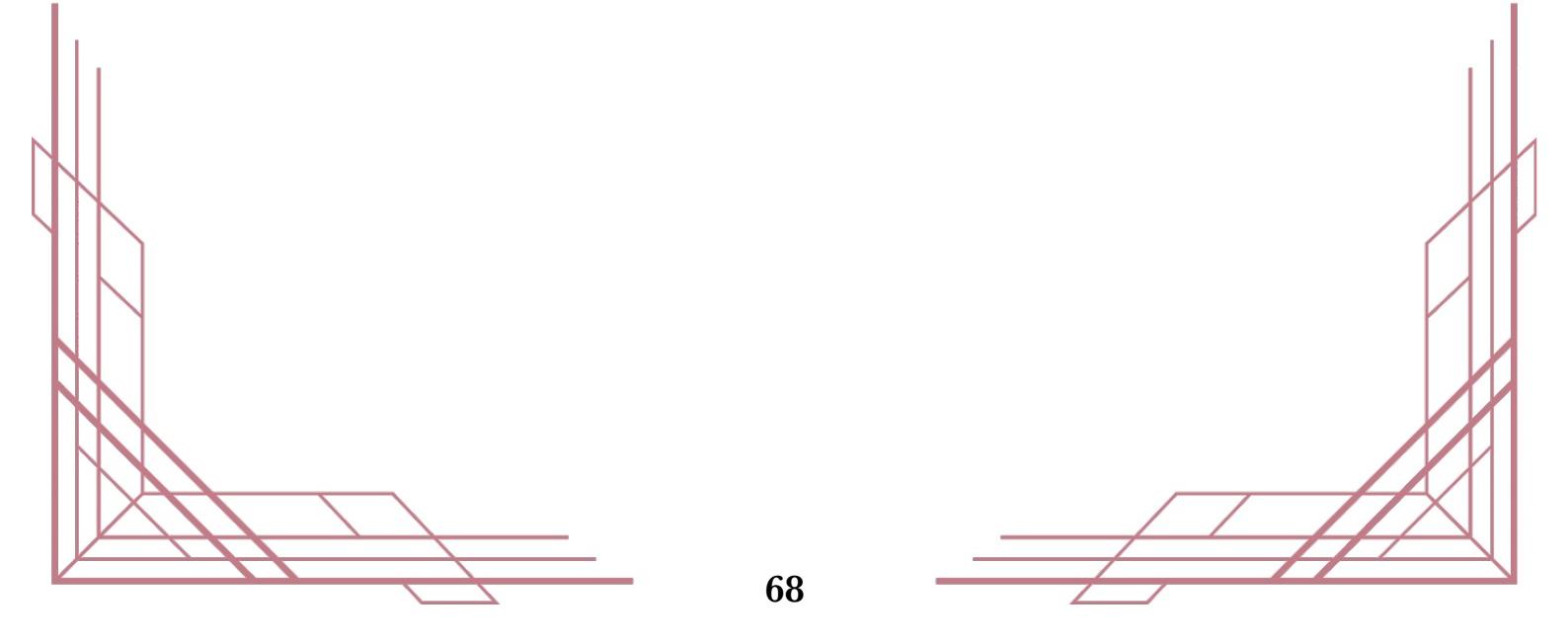
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